Characters

- Marie
- Eddie
- Estelle
- Doctor
- Woman in Black

Act

A dim stage, full of strange objects. A tilted table with a low built back that contains small arches. Two padded walls against which the actors occasionally bounce with great force. Many chairs of different, nondescript style. Far rear, a circular wooden revolvable merry-go-round frame, a couch and a piano, tables loaded with objects. To one side is an antique wind machine — a revolving drum covered with a piece of canvas. Scattered about are microphones, which the actors speak into on many occasions. The actors always speak quietly, and there is often soft music behind the action, continually changing, and sometimes building to deafening climax. A sign on the rear wall says "Poetry City." A light bulb in its center goes on at selected moments during the play.

As the audience assembles, the actors are visible, relaxing at the rear of the set. At a certain point, they begin whispering, then tickle each other and try to suppress fits of giggling, as the sound of a drum roll rises. A ***WOMAN*** *who sits alone at the rear of the stage on a high stool for the whole play, wearing a black dunce cap, shouts out aggressively, "Excuse me!" — and the actors stop tussling with each other and race forward.* ***MARIE*** *and* ***ESTELLE****, the two women, quickly pull a black curtain which rides on a wire eight feet above the floor. After a while,* ***EDDIE*** *appears in a slit in the curtain, coming just halfway out. There is another pause, and then the voice of the* ***DOCTOR****, the other male actor in the play, is heard, speaking softly over a loudspeaker.*

DOCTOR

If this were a play, a curtain would be drawn. And the audience would be in darkness.

VOICE OF MARIE

(*After a pause*)

If this were a play, a room would be visible . . .

(*Curtain is quickly reopened. A giant abstract head is seen on the* ***DOCTOR'S*** *body as he stands in the shadows, rear*)

Into which one would project one's imagination.

ESTELLE

(*Into a microphone. Everyone speaks softly, as if in a dream*)

If this were a play, a line of dialogue would suddenly emerge from the silence of dimly illuminated space.

EDDIE

If this were a play . . .

(*He takes a step back into the playing space*)

— the room would be crowded with men and women in evening dress. Cigar smoke would hover in the air. And a chosen someone would lean forward as if his face were exploding. He wouldn't speak, because he wouldn't have to. But . . . he would speak.

MARIE

(*Sings softly to herself*)

Secret door
Secret door
Can I find
The secret door.
DEEP VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKER

(*The stage tableau is frozen*)

The center was nothing
The edge was nothing
The bottom was nothing
The root was nothing
The depth was nothing
The extension was nothing
The kernel was nothing.
WOMAN IN BLACK

Excuse me!

EDDIE

Let me introduce you to a man who tried to turn himself into a work of art.

MARIE

A work of art must push open a door to another world — isn't that right?

EDDIE

I'm trying to find a secret door.

MARIE

Is it a door to another world?

EDDIE

Well . . . yes.

MARIE

Then don't move.

EDDIE

(*Pause*)

Why?

MARIE

(*After a pause*)

I wanted to see how long it would be before you moved.

(***EDDIE*** *races to one of the padded walls and bounces off, as* ***MARIE*** *runs to sit, putting on a bonnet, and* ***EDDIE****, fallen to the ground, crawls across the floor, then rises and goes to the tilted table to become fascinated by the built up rear side with holes, which looks a bit like a tiny Roman arena in which demonstrations might be imagined. As this is happening, the deep* ***VOICE*** *begins speaking over the loudspeakers*)

DEEP VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKERS

Eddie went to Poetry City. The soft air, gray and granulated, offered itself to his sniff. Somebody must be burning logs, said Eddie. But in fact, he was wrong. Global forces were at work, but Eddie was localized. He opened a local window, and before he could open a local window, something came whirling into his mind's eye like a photograph of the whole planet from a place far in space.

(***EDDIE*** *has knelt at the table, and* ***MARIE*** *also kneels, and the sawing stops*)

Look, there's Poetry City under a cloud of fog — Oh, Eddie, from where you sit, it's so atmospheric to be looking at the sun bursting into the city through clouds of

soft fog. Eddie realized that by midday the air would be clear, and Poetry City would be like any place else. Would it still be Poetry City? Of course, offered Marie. Maps don't change.

(*The* ***DOCTOR*** *and* ***ESTELLE*** *run to separate sawhorses with logs strapped on top, and begin furiously sawing at the logs, and* ***EDDIE*** *rises and runs to crash into the padded wall. He recovers and staggers to a chair, where he sits, holding his head and clutching a briefcase. The others quiet down*)

Maps don't change. Maps don't change.

(***ESTELLE*** *comes behind* ***EDDIE****, and as the voice continues, she leans over him from behind and puts her arms around his neck, which makes him uncomfortable*)

Is this the city where looking out the window in late afternoon, a beautiful vista seems dominated by the faint tracerbullet patterns of many automobiles in motion, evoking, as they cross the visible-from-a-distance multitude of bridges spanning the magic river that gives mythic dimension to this city nestled in its curve — automobiles evoking that specific seen-from-far-away energy that paints precise, punctuated, energy strips in the imagination of someone who perhaps relies too much upon that same imagination?

(***EDDIE*** *rises unsteadily to come forward to the audience*)

There he goes, encasing himself in a work of art —

(*The noise of a small collision bounces **EDDIE** back into his chair*)

— in a prototype, at least

(***ESTELLE** swings a movable railing in a semicircle, which, as it happens, passes over **EDDIE'S** chair and knocks him off. He struggles back onto the chair*)

So. He made plans. But here's the important part. He didn't try to define them.

Plans? Plans.

(***EDDIE** reaches into his briefcase and takes out a map, which he slowly smooths out over his lap*)

It all adds up to the same thing, no? He made a work of art for himself, into which he might hopefully disappear. Then, seeing corners at the corners, and in response pulling the entire edifice of his sometimes comfortable enough life, over his body like a blanket, could he be in fact so blanketed? Time to escape, the new woman said.

(***MARIE** has posed her body on the tilted table, spreading her legs, slowly unwrapping a bandaged leg to reveal a red wound on her inner thigh, and holding out an apple in one hand to tempt Eddie, who slowly crosses to her*)

But. Escape what, escape to what? The new woman did not say escape to what and we all knew to escape, but we did not know to escape to what. So what made her new, this new woman? She was always new because she was so . . . ethereal.

MARIE

I take no responsibility for my own etherealness, that's what she should have truly said.

DEEP VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKERS

That was not new.

(***EDDIE** is creeping up onto the table toward **MARIE'S** apple, but in reaching for it he somehow stumbles and falls on his back, between **MARIE'S** now uplifted legs, and her apple drops and bounces off his head*)

What was new was that he began to perceive, under this blanking artifact, artifactually enough, that what was new and strange was his own relationship to whatever spewed forth, because now, believe it or not, he did not have the feeling it was necessary for him to be mountainous in his efforts of will, all directed to making his life cohere into one of the twenty-seven life models ordered specifically into HIS consciousness on pain of death,

which certainly could not be avoided down the road someplace.

(*The **DOCTOR** is at the rear, cleaning a large shovel and crying softly to himself, as **EDDIE** and **MARIE** remain frozen on the table*)

Road, road, road, he said to himself in the hopes it might indicate a direction. Also realizing it could be more than one. And again automobiles started jumping a little bit like pretend molecules of a very bright light — and he decided to spend a lot of time and effort creating what was more than a simple lament, because it was never simple. There was a lot of debate later — which route did he take to success and glory that was — Oops, I almost said "unprincipled" when I mean to say "unparalleled." And with the parallel — though words

are not things that can ever be parallel to each other like worlds can — he nevertheless fell quite off the track.

(*The **DOCTOR** and **ESTELLE** have gathered around the table where **EDDIE** and **MARIE** lie frozen and entangled, and all now start shading their eyes against what might be a terrible vision, or a very bright light*)

Into the car? But do cars ride on steel tracks, or on asphalt pavement sometimes? Put them together this way — Have you ever imagined one of those incredibility ravishing contests between automobile and passenger train? Somebody thought you'd have to go back to the turn of the century for that, but what they were really imagining, his friends volunteered, was the nineteen-thirties. But the confusion was understandable, because the turn of the century was the epic, par excellence, of that powerful iron-horse metaphor-as-drug, and if there's one thing that did need to be drugged,

it was this sensibility in question that above all was scheming to GET OUT OF HERE any way possible.

(***MARIE** gives **EDDIE** a shove off the table, and he falls and grabs onto a cardboard industrial drum that stands at the foot of the table. Then he feels his way over the top of the drum and goes to the ground head first, but as his feet follow, his legs grasp the barrel and he begins crossing the room in a crawl on the floor, legs locked around the barrel, which follows him upstage, and **ESTELLE** runs and puts a little mechanical toy on its top. It waddles around in a circle on the barrel top, as **EDDIE** drags everything upstage. **MARIE** and **ESTELLE** then run to saw on the logs, and the **DOCTOR** makes the wind machine turn at a great rate. Finally things quiet down, and **MARIE** and **ESTELLE** race to one of the side walls and begin feeling along the wall for a secret door*)

MARIE

(*Singing to herself as she feels the wall*)

Secret door,
secret door . . .
DEEP VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKERS

Here's the main thing. You're looking for an escape route —

EDDIE

(*Who has arrived at one of the padded walls, also feeling along it for an opening*)

Am I?

DEEP VOICE

It could manifest itself in different ways. A route, a method of locomotion. A secret door. You can't find the secret door, because it isn't in this world, but in the other. The one you want to escape to. So use it. Use the secret door. Remember — It isn't in this world, it's located in the world you want to escape to. Use it.

MARIE

(*Comes away from her wall, a few steps toward Eddie, and speaks in a nearby microphone*)

Confused?

I'll change the subject a little.

(She holds out a strange painting of a head with a halo that she has been hiding behind her back)

What do you think of this painting?

*(The **DOCTOR**, at a microphone in the rear, whispers echoes of all the lines that follow)*

EDDIE

I like it.

MARIE

You do?

EDDIE

Yes. I like it.

MARIE

*(Smirking, as **ESTELLE** giggles)*

Then there's no more to be said, is there?

EDDIE

(After a pause, very quietly)

Burn it.

MARIE

What?

EDDIE

Burn it.

MARIE

Ah, because you like it so much?

EDDIE

Exactly.

MARIE

What a spiritual trip.

(She starts to go, then turns back to the mike)

You really want it burned?

EDDIE

Yes.

MARIE

Then I'll take it into the next room, where we always perform such rites of sacrifice.

*(She goes upstage, and **ESTELLE** comes to **EDDIE** and acts as if she were pulling back the front curtain, so **EDDIE** could watch)*

ESTELLE

(Very quietly, with a smirk)

Maybe you want to watch?

EDDIE

No. I trust you.

ESTELLE

(Pause)

No. I trust . . .

(She lifts a finger and points to his head)

You.

*(She turns away, as **MARIE** returns without the painting and walks straight up to **EDDIE**)*

It's done.

(She slaps him sharply on the cheek and he steps back, holding his face)

EDDIE

That was quick.

MARIE

Yes.

(Pause)

You should have opened the door.

EDDIE

Did you really burn it?

MARIE

(Into a microphone)

Yes.

EDDIE

(Under his breath, as he sits)

Bastard.

MARIE

Why do you say that?

EDDIE

I have my reasons.

MARIE

You must be of two minds.

EDDIE

Not at all.

MARIE

Am I a bastard a hundred percent of the time?

EDDIE

No. You have me there.

MARIE

Have you?

EDDIE

You're not a bastard a hundred percent of the time. Therefore I have to try to be in sync with you, but I know I'm relatively fallible and can't pull it off all the time.

*(There is a pause. **MARIE** has forgotten her next line, and the **WOMAN** in black shouts out, "Now that you burned the*

*painting which you say you liked so very much!" **MARIE** turns and gives her a dirty look, and then goes to another mike and speaks her line)*

MARIE

(Very softly)

Now that I burned the painting which you say you liked so very much —

EDDIE

Oh, I did.

MARIE

Do you want to see another?

EDDIE

You have lots of them stored away.

MARIE

Yes. I only exhibit one at a time.

EDDIE

(Staring into space)

It's snowing.

MARIE

So it is.

(Pause)

Anyway, do you want to look at another painting?

EDDIE

No.

MARIE

Suppose I told you I didn't really burn the painting.

EDDIE

Did you?

MARIE

(Crossing)

Yes. Come take a look for it in the next room, Eddie.

*(She is wiping her hands, as the **DOCTOR** comes forward to join them. The **DOCTOR** is now dressed strangely. He is wearing a pig's nose, with tubes from the nose circling his body. He also wears an apron and a stocking cap, which gives him the semblance of a bald skull. He carries a briefcase)*

All you'll find is ashes. And by the way, the reason it was able to burn so quickly is that I use a blowtorch. Ashes were prefigured in our train references.

DOCTOR

(Smiles threateningly)

That's one way of looking at it.

MARIE

(Pause)

The race between the automobile and the passenger train could also be thought of as our symbolic confrontation.

DOCTOR

*(To **EDDIE**, tossing him the briefcase)*

Which is which?

MARIE

(Smiles)

I take it back.

DOCTOR

(Turns to her)

You can't, you've committed yourself.

*(The **DOCTOR** and **ESTELLE** run to the merry-go-round, rear, and run it in a full circle — and it makes a loud rattling noise as it is revolved, and Eddie hurries to a corner and extracts another small painting from the briefcase — very similar to the other, a head with a halo)*

WOMAN IN BLACK

(Over the noise)

Excuse me!

(Everything stops)

EDDIE

(Staring forward into the light, wearing dark glasses now)

. . . The automobile is racing to be able to cross at the railroad crossing before it gets smacked by the locomotive of the passenger train carrying, as fate would have it, the unbeknownst beloved.

*(Pause, he looks at **MARIE**, who steps toward him)*

So you must be the passenger train. And I'm the one about to get smacked by the loco.

MARIE

(Into a mike)

I'd say the one who wants to burn a painting he likes very much, and you really did — that's the loco I'd

think.

DOCTOR

*(Coming close to **EDDIE**, thrusting his chin almost onto **EDDIE'S** shoulder)*

The one who carried out the wishes of the loco with such dispatch is also a kind of loco.

MARIE

(Under her breath)

Bastard.

ESTELLE

(At a mike upstage, carrying another painting, which is hidden under a cloth)

I couldn't help overhearing your conversation and realizing that you want someone to disagree,

but that's impossible.

*(**MARIE** starts toward **ESTELLE**, who steps forward a bit to stop her, also thrusting her covered painting out in front of her)*

I mean, you WERE speaking in what seemed an unnaturally loud tone of voice, so you obviously did want to be overheard and judged, but unfortunately I judge you in a way that's not to your liking.

MARIE

Unless?

ESTELLE

Unless what?

(Pause)

Oh, I get it. Unless your liking is to be not to my liking.

(She whips the cloth away, revealing another similar painting of a head with a halo. There's a pause. The light changes)

EDDIE

Didn't you notice the sun came out?

(The light softens)

One minute it's snowing, the next minute the sun's out. The only implication is you get melted snow. Unless, of course, the snow was a mistake.

DOCTOR

How can snow be a mistake?

EDDIE

Well, somebody could torch it. Isn't that what they say people do to houses? Gangsters — they torch a house.

*(Turns to **MARIE**)*

Just like we — you — torched a painting.

*(**MARIE** throws her arms around **EDDIE** and kisses him on the mouth, and he struggles and frees himself with a lurch, and he gasps for breath and equilibrium)*

You know, I can no longer remember even who's responsible. The one who physically executes, or the one who provides the inspiration.

MARIE

Could I invite you back to my apartment for a look at a very unique art collection?

EDDIE

What's unique about your art collection?

ESTELLE

(Smirking)

She'll make you burn all your most beautiful pictures.

MARIE

There are other ways paintings can be sacrificed to the gods.

EDDIE

The who?

(They are both downstage, talking into a mike)

MARIE

The gods. I see you don't believe what I'm talking about.

EDDIE

You think you mean gods that I don't believe in, but I do — my own.

MARIE

Here's one.

*(She turns upstage, looking to where the **DOCTOR**, in the shadows, has been winding white surgical gauze over his head so he looks like a mummy. He also takes a small painting, which he carries under his arm, but **EDDIE** has seen none of this)*

EDDIE

You anticipate that long before it happens.

(He turns and is shocked to see the mummy)

MARIE

I told you it would happen. What I didn't tell you was that he would come through HIS door into OUR world. But from our perspective, that's not the important thing. Poor us. Look what he's got under his arm, by the way.

ESTELLE

Your favorite painting, Eddie.

MARIE

(Running against the wall in mock surprise — or is it horror?)

Oh, YOU'RE Eddie!

ESTELLE

What does that explain?

EDDIE

Isn't anybody else surprised to see a godlike manifestation?

MARIE

We're not sure what it is.

DOCTOR

(From under his bandages, intoning like a mummy)

I am . . .!

(He begins shuffling across the stage)

EDDIE

Sure?

DOCTOR

Yes, VERY sure . . .!

EDDIE

(Turning away to speak to himself through a microphone)

A painting that returns from the dead either wasn't dead, or else has regenerative powers related to a god's interest in such a potent image.

MARIE

It's wonderful that you and your god have the same taste in paintings.

*(The **DOCTOR** bangs into the wall and drops the painting)*

EDDIE

(Worried)

I don't know that we do.

MARIE

But he's the sacred messenger!

*(The **DOCTOR** has bent down to laboriously retrieve the painting)*

DOCTOR

May I speak?

EDDIE

Does a god have to ask permission?

ESTELLE

Weren't you shocked at the timbre of his voice? It wasn't expectedly godlike, was it? Which implies, on my part, how much happier we'd all be if he or it didn't speak.

*(There is a pause. At first it seems that everyone has been stunned into silence at the god's surprise appearance. Then it's made clear that **EDDIE** has simply forgotten his next line, since the **WOMAN IN BLACK** shouts out his line: "May I look at the picture?")*

EDDIE

(After giving her a dirty look, mumbles his line into a mike)

May I look at the picture?

MARIE

Is it exactly the same?

EDDIE

It looks the same.

MARIE

Should we reburn it?

EDDIE

I don't think so, since it was remanifest in such a miraculous way.

*(The **DOCTOR** (Mummy) has made his way center stage, lifting the painting in the air doing a slow ritual dance as the music rises to a deafening level. **ESTELLE** has distributed snow shovels, and **EDDIE** follows the women's lead as they begin pantomiming the shoveling of dirt onto the god and his painting as the god begins howling rhythmically over the music. Then they throw away their shovels and run away to watch from a distance, as **EDDIE** shouts over the decreasing music)*

EDDIE

Sometimes it's definitely chaotic!

MARIE

I wouldn't use that word for a miracle.

EDDIE

You think it's a real miracle?

MARIE

Well, let's say yes.

ESTELLE

Hey, you must love pictures more than you love anything, Eddie!

*(The **DOCTOR** has wandered to the side, and again bounces against a wall)*

EDDIE

I don't think miracles are handed out right and left. Therefore if one occurs, it must be linked to a pivot point inside your private value system.

DOCTOR

(Recovering from his bang against the wall, looking about dazed)

Hey! What time is it?

EDDIE

I'm sorry. You can go on theorizing if you like —

*(The **DOCTOR** starts unwrapping himself)*

MARIE

You think it's so banal?

EDDIE

I'd rather clear the airwaves of all possible interference.

MARIE

That's not possible, Eddie.

EDDIE

It's possible. I'm encasing myself in a work of art. You know what that means? My life, really.

(Pause, advancing forward)

That's why I wanted to burn a painting I liked very much. A distraction, right? It had to be cleared out of my life totally. I think you get the point even though I've been careful to circle rather than zeroing in.

*(During this speech, **ESTELLE** has taken a pose on the tilted table. She holds a big red-and-white beach ball over her head, as if posing for a cheesecake photo)*

MARIE

*(Leaning into a mike, as the lights brighten on **ESTELLE**)*

Now, let's pretend we've finally made it to the beach —

EDDIE

(Turning)

What?

MARIE

It's a warm, sunny day. We doff our workaday apparel. We strip down to bathing suits or perhaps no clothing at all, and slowly march into the shining ocean. From which, within the briefest possible period of time, one or two of us start to rise, as if we weighed now, no more than air, into the sun.

EDDIE

Why talk about a beach, we could do that right here.

MARIE

I don't see it happening.

EDDIE

I was allowing myself a moment of reverie.

ESTELLE

(Still in her pose)

What's the question, Eddie?

EDDIE

Question?

MARIE

Perhaps it's a question that's supposed to provoke other questions.

ESTELLE

It's too bad our picture can't speak to us, Eddie.

EDDIE

(To himself, testing out his own name)

Eddie . . .?

DOCTOR

(Leans in threateningly, but still in his ridiculous nose with tubes, bald pate, and apron, all of which he wears for the rest of the show)

Should we BURN it, Eddie?

EDDIE

(Very quietly)

My name is Eddie and I plan to escape to Poetry City.

DOCTOR

Escape?

EDDIE

Don't be upset if I tell you, you participate in a life I find oppressive.

MARIE

Why, Eddie?

EDDIE

I find oppressive, life that is not centered, continually, on concern for the human spirit. That has to be the center.

DOCTOR

But Eddie, you've described life as it is here, where you are this very minute.

*(The **WOMAN IN BLACK** shouts out a repeat of the **DOCTOR'S** line: "But Eddie! You've described life as it is here, where you are this very minute." Then with much giggling, the **DOCTOR, MARIE**, and **ESTELLE** run to spin the merry-go-round once, then they grab wineglasses, and taking a drink, come forward tempting Eddie to join their party)*

EDDIE

In a hidden sense, maybe.

DOCTOR

Not hidden, Eddie. It wobbles, perhaps, because that's the human condition.

EDDIE

Wobbles?

DOCTOR

Yes. You know — wobbles.

(They giggle)

EDDIE

It's true, I wobble when I walk.

DOCTOR

Be careful, Eddie, you're going in circles.

EDDIE

What?

DOCTOR

(A pretend smile)

I didn't say anything.

EDDIE

I thought you did.

(Turns away)

I was talking to myself.

DOCTOR

(With a little wave)

Goodbye.

*(But instead of leaving, the **DOCTOR, MARIE**, and **ESTELLE** all sit to sip at their wineglasses. Eddie then sits also, tentatively, as if afraid to do the wrong thing. He is facing them, his back to the audience. Then he turns in his chair to face out)*

EDDIE

(After a pause, quietly, as if convincing himself)

Here I am. Totally okay.

MARIE

Totally happy?

EDDIE

Yes.

(A loud noise knocks the others off their chairs onto the floor. They reseat themselves, and try to recover their composure)

ESTELLE

Totally at peace?

EDDIE

Yes.

(A noise again knocks the others to the floor. This time it continues, and they twitch on the floor for a few seconds,

like fish out of water. Then it stops, and they recompose themselves, but remain on the floor)

MARIE

What city is this?

EDDIE

Poetry City.

MARIE

Are you sure?

DOCTOR

Harmony comes from opposites, Eddie. Everything originates in strife.

ESTELLE

Guess who said that?

EDDIE

(Pause)

Where's a map?

ESTELLE

(A gentle threat)

Look on the table.

*(**EDDIE** goes to a table rear, where props are piled. He pushes a few to the floor in his search and comes back with a map, which he unfolds and holds in front of him, trying to read it)*

MARIE

(Very slowly, deliberately)

It was the wrong . . . table.

EDDIE

Oh? . . . This is the wrong map?

MARIE

It was the wrong . . . table.

EDDIE

(Pause, he presses the open map to his chest)

So, this is where we are now. Could I put this map of Poetry City on the wall?

MARIE

How?

EDDIE

(Pause)

Do you have any . . . thumbtacks?

MARIE

Wouldn't that . . . hurt the wall?

EDDIE

(Pause, considering this carefully)

Well, it would put very small holes in the wall. *(Pause)* It's okay, then?

MARIE

Best not.

EDDIE

Okay. I'll just fold it up and put it in my pocket.

*(He starts to do so, when **ESTELLE** comes up behind him and shoves him into the padded wall. He bounces off and falls to the floor and starts crawling to a chair on the other side of the room)*

DEEP VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKERS

Eddie knew the streets of Poetry City by heart, so when a map appeared in his pocket, he wasn't confused. He flipped through the streets in his mind, and a door opened across the street. That's a good fifty yards from me, thought Eddie, but still he jumped out of the way. But Eddie, he realized, that jump was unnecessary, he realized. And he noticed his map, on fire.

*(By now, **MARIE** has run to another table and taken a stack of books (poetry books?).*

*She has started throwing them, one by one, at the crawling **EDDIE**. At the same time, as the music rises and falls several times, the **DOCTOR** and **ESTELLE** run rear, grab snow shovels, load them with trays of food, and run and bounce the shovels on the backs of chairs till the food bounces off*

*(amid much noise, of course) and scatters on the floor. **MARIE** and **ESTELLE** finally sit together, entwined, staring at **EDDIE**, who has by now found a seat, as the **DOCTOR** races rear, seizes a bowling ball, and bowls it from the rear into the middle of the assembled group, knocking over a few chairs)*

ESTELLE

*(As **EDDIE** sits panting and disheveled across from her)*

‘Fess up, Eddie —

WOMAN IN BLACK

(Shouts)

Oh, Eddie! 'Fess up!

ESTELLE

Is this really your kind of town?

EDDIE

I haven't been here very long.

ESTELLE

But you get the feel of things kinda fast, Eddie —

WOMAN IN BLACK

EDDIE!

ESTELLE

— or I miss my guess.

WOMAN IN BLACK

EDDIE!

*(The **DOCTOR** bowls another ball through the center, and **EDDIE** gets out of the way, but tries to act as if he*

isn't upset)

EDDIE

I'm the kind of person —

ESTELLE

Nothing satisfies you, yes?

EDDIE

You're right.

ESTELLE

*(She is speaking into a mike on a cable, which she manipulates seductively, still entwined with **MARIE**, who is trying to read one of the books she was recently hurling at **EDDIE**)*

So this isn't really your kind of town, Eddie.

WOMAN IN BLACK

EDDIE!

ESTELLE

I mean, for the first day or two, Eddie says to himself —

WOMAN IN BLACK

EDDIE!

ESTELLE

— "Hey, maybe this is okay." You managed to squeeze out a little poetic frisson from a turn around the corner into this vista, then that vista, but then with a little more time, it didn't really seem to hold up for Eddie, did it?

WOMAN IN BLACK

EDDIE!

EDDIE

(After an uncomfortable pause)

You're right.

MARIE

(Smiles)

No, YOU'RE right.

*(She and **ESTELLE** look at each other and share a laugh)*

ESTELLE

Of course I'm right. This town is a shit town. Take it from me, Eddie. I had deep experience of this shit town, and a shit town is what it is.

EDDIE

That doesn't leave much doubt.

ESTELLE

On the other hand, a lot of opportunity is here, for somebody looking for a certain kind of something.

EDDIE

Oh? What kind of something?

ESTELLE

You don't expect me to make myself overly clear, I think.

EDDIE

Well, I don't know if that's your habit or not.

MARIE

*(Moving toward **EDDIE**, who has risen, ready to run)*

What about your habits, Eddie? Don't YOUR habits have something to do with the overall situation?

EDDIE

I get myself into certain situations where I don't know quite . . . how to respond.

(Pause; he looks about nervously)

Like now?

MARIE

Yes. Why the hell don't you know how to respond?

WOMAN IN BLACK

Do you want: absolute clarity, Eddie!?!

MARIE

You want absolute clarity? Or are you aware of the disadvantages built into absolute clarity. That seems to be the question I'm putting to you, and you seem to me

perfectly capable of coming up with some kind of response.

EDDIE

Yes. I should be. Certainly . . .

DOCTOR

So? Do you want absolute clarity?

*(He is now sitting with **ESTELLE**, his hands exploring her body as she sedately rubs her body against him)*

WOMAN IN BLACK

Do you want: absolute clarity, Eddie!?!

*(**EDDIE** turns to run, hits the padded wall, bounces off, and staggers a few feet)*

EDDIE

(Recovering)

Let me ask, if I can — can we define again the area under discussion?

MARIE

*(Suddenly more aggressive, as the **DOCTOR** and **ESTELLE** get even more deeply involved with each other)*

Suddenly things get clarified. You're interested in entertainment.

*(**ESTELLE** giggles, then she and the **DOCTOR** run to the merry-go-round and spin it once, after which they freeze, waiting for the next activity with which to befuddle **EDDIE**)*

You're one of those people who can't be alone with his life! This perpetual drift from city to city, a diversion. That's all!

EDDIE

Go on —

MARIE

Go on to what?

EDDIE

Go on with what you were saying.

MARIE

(Shouting into a mike)

What do you want from me, anyhow? That's not what you're gonna get, buster! You're gonna get a truckload of shit, that's what you're gonna get, and don't tell me you don't like it, because by the time I'm finished with you, you're gonna LOVE it.

*(**MARIE, ESTELLE**, and the **DOCTOR** run to get three cardboard industrial drums from the rear. They set*

*them center stage and pose over them, watching **EDDIE**. He gets the idea, runs to get one of his own, brings it center and waits)*

EDDIE

(After a pause, for lack of anything else to say)

Okay.

MARIE

Okay!

DOCTOR AND ESTELLE

Okay!

*(The **DOCTOR, ESTELLE**, and **MARIE** bend down, and the top halves of their bodies disappear into the drums. After looking about for a beat, **EDDIE** decides to join them, and he too disappears. Terrible groaning music builds, as all slowly emerge from the drums, their faces smeared around the mouth with a thick, sticky brown substance. As the music gets louder, the **DOCTOR, ESTELLE**, and **MARIE** lift their barrels and hold them, horizontal — and **EDDIE** tentatively follows. Then he crosses and places his barrel against one of the padded walls, the top open part flat on the wall. The others line their barrels up behind him, so the held barrels form a kind of segmented snake, head against the wall. The music is deafening now. They all retract the barrels a few inches so a slight gap opens up between each barrel, and then suddenly all barrels are smashed together and against the wall. This is repeated. The music is deafening. After several of these, all retreat, worn out, and lay their barrels carefully on the floor. Slowly, they first sit on the barrels, then immediately crawl forward and twist and crawl half-way inside the barrels, their legs sticking out. The music finally fades. As **EDDIE** emerges slowly and collapses into a chair)*

EDDIE

At a certain point in my life, I realized that my mind had been incorrectly focused.

(The others are out, sitting exhausted also)

It would be, I realized, a terribly difficult task to reorient the focus mechanism. I doubted that I had the

energy and determination. Therefore, I tried to imagine other, less demanding procedures whereby I might achieve that identical goal. That is, the effect of refocusing, without refocusing.

MARIE

(Calls out softly, as if from far away)

E . . . ddie . . .

*(After a pause, the **DOCTOR, ESTELLE** and **MARIE** rise and start rearranging the furniture. They are fashioning a sort of restaurant setting, with the barrels, turned upside down, serving as tables. As this is done, the deep **VOICE** is heard over the loudspeakers)*

DEEP VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKERS
In Poetry City,
I bet I stay

a real long time, in fact,
because more poetry means more fun.

(A loud crack, and all freeze for one sentence, then continue)

What was that noise,
That metallic crack, in fact?
Something in my heart?
Not at all;
a vehicle exploded,
or rather began to and stopped,
because nothing in Poetry City fulfills itself.
Which is why it's Poetry City,
get it?
I bet you didn't
but it happened like that
and whatever it is that happens
gets into you, somehow
in Poetry City.

I've had fine, fine meals here.

The philosopher turned over his plate
In Poetry City.
In the restaurant called JOY
He finished his lunch from
a series of uncomfortable positions.
JOY, JOY, the passerby was corrected
as he almost thought of asking
old-timers
for the most dependable restaurant
in Poetry City.
The gray clouds hung over something
beyond street corners
that evoked
what should have been docks
but no river flowed or ever,
cut wet
in between the semi-tall buildings.
What's the best way in and out
Of Poetry City?
Not by water of course,
there is none.
And the philosopher dried his throat.
Not by air
which compacts over the city whole
like a blanket of foam,
and the philosopher swallowed hard.
Not by rail,
for once,
where streetcars cut electric slap paths
into the interior

now rest assured with lying wherever you find yourself.
And the philosopher turned to dessert
which had been served first anyway —
and made a smile out of his mental muscles.
You look happy,
claimed his companion and vanished.
Which one of them?
An answer was
Shhh, forever.

*(**ESTELLE** has pulled the black curtain, so the reset room is hidden. As she does so, we hear one more roll of a bowling ball across the floor, and the crash as it hits a wall. Sickly sweet music is playing, as the **DOCTOR** appears through the curtain. He has been transformed into a waiter. He carries a tray, and a rose, and smiles dopily at the audience, as if he has taken some kind of pacifying drug. From behind the curtain we hear **EDDIE** calling in irritation —)*

EDDIE

(Behind the curtain)

Waiter!?!

DOCTOR

(Smiling at the audience)

Helloooo!

DEEP VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKERS

*(As the **DOCTOR** smells his rose)*

Oh, Eddie. Sweeten the self, and do not act, which will sweeten the self through not acting, not projecting the self into gross matter through the act, which falls into the real world that is not sweet.

EDDIE

(Appearing through the curtain)

Why not employ a more efficient waiter?

MARIE

(From behind the curtain, into a microphone)

Oh, Eddie, what's the name of this town of famous restaurants?

EDDIE

Why employ a waiter that does not act?

MARIE

(Still hidden)

Guess again.

*(The curtain has opened, and the **DOCTOR** takes up an ecstatic pose in the center of the room, smelling his rose and ignoring the restaurant's one customer — Eddie)*

EDDIE

(Seating himself at a table)

Waiter?

DOCTOR

(Dopily ecstatic, waves at Eddie)

Hello.

EDDIE

I'd like some fish.

(Pause. Nobody moves)

Is that possible?

MARIE

(She sits at a table, laying out cards like a fortuneteller. A mike has been positioned so she can speak into it)

It is possible.

EDDIE

Will you bring me some fish?

DOCTOR

(Shakes head, sadly)

Ahhhhh . . . No . . .

EDDIE

Why employ a waiter who does not act?

MARIE

He sweetens himself, and my restaurant burns, lightens.

EDDIE

I don't understand "lightens."

MARIE

I can't explain "lightens".

*(A noise, and she throws her cards in the air as **ESTELLE** grabs **EDDIE** and pushes him to the center of the room. He composes himself, and begins to recite, as if in school, a memorized text. He is perhaps this evening's entertainment in the restaurant?)*

EDDIE
The night was outside the window,
as well as inside where Eddie was.
Nothing . . . turned into a poem.
And a great weight lifted from Eddie's chest, from his
shoulders and forehead.
Poems exited from all parts of his body.
And in leaving
they turned to nothing.
That nothing was Eddie's medium.
He drank deep, and picked up the telephone.
Hello? Who is nobody;
On the other end of the line.
Many faces flashed from Eddie's mind
onto the wallpaper
that curled up like burnt leaves.

(His recitation finished, he finds his way back to his seat. There is another pause. He decides to try again)

Waiter, I'd like some fish.

WOMAN IN BLACK

Excuse me!

EDDIE

(Pause)

Would I really?

DOCTOR

(Smiles, staring into space)

Please, don't pay me for fish.

EDDIE

(Confused and irritated)

Normally, I don't pay for fish until I've received it.

DOCTOR

*(Sitting beside **EDDIE**, puts an arm around him, which makes **EDDIE** very uncomfortable)*

Would you like to look at it, sir?

EDDIE

I try to imagine it.

DOCTOR

Try . . .

*(**ESTELLE** has one of the snow shovels, loaded with fish, which she smacks against a wall behind **EDDIE**. Then she immediately holds it over his head)*

. . . to imagine it.

EDDIE

(Under his breath)

Look at this river . . .
No fiery angels on this river.
MARIE
This river?
Is that a river?
EDDIE

(To himself)

I can imagine a river. I can imagine fiery angels on the river, and fish leaping into the sky in happiness.

MARIE

We let them leap, I believe.

DOCTOR

I'm a waiter who does nothing, and in the end, it makes you happy, also.

EDDIE

I'd like to eat. Why? Because dinnertime has come, you see?

(Shows his watch)

MARIE

I see.

(She jumps up to go rear to sit at the piano)

EDDIE

(Calling after her, in irritation)

Would your restaurant be more successful —

*(He jumps up, hits his head on the fish shovel, the others shout "Owww!" but **EDDIE** speedily recovers, and takes a few steps to call after **MARIE**)*

— as a restaurant, if you employed a waiter who did not — NOT act?

*(**MARIE** starts playing the piano, as the **DOCTOR** is next to **EDDIE** and slumps against his body as if his passive and ecstatic state would make him collapse, so **EDDIE** grabs him to keep him from falling, and starts trying to hold him up, which turns into an awkward dance of embrace)*

DEEP VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKERS

*(As **MARIE** plays, and **EDDIE** and the **DOCTOR** dance)*

Heart carved
he opened his palm
A light spread
left to right;
insignia of flash,
idea imprint
over vista-weight.
Rapid into
a clutch
that spasmed
itself.
A mix
total.

EDDIE

*(Still holding the **DOCTOR** up, trying to talk past his body to the audience)*

This waiter does not act. He does not descend into the real world, where he takes my desire for fish and gratifies it.

*(The **DOCTOR** is standing on his own now, and **EDDIE** takes a step away)*

I taste the imaginary fish in my mouth. I feel what it does to my throat, as the taste seems to spread in multiple directions inside me. By what pathways I do not know.

DOCTOR

How did I become a waiter?

*(He starts to fall, **EDDIE** again catches him)*

How did I come to dress, and be here? Now I remember.

(He regains his balance and frees himself)

MARIE

(Moving downstage)

It was as if you were doing a walk that was a kind of revolving perpetual, and that spin, that wobble, as it

were, spun you into my restaurant.

*(A loud noise, and **MARIE** is isolated in a spotlight, pointing aggressively at the **DOCTOR**)*

I HAVE ANOTHER IDEA! Which I admit is inspired by viewing this waiter that I employ, or seem to. Do I employ? He WOBBLES into my employ! He is, wobbling, sustained within my employ. This waiter does not fall into concrete being with acts, but hovers — always on the verge of delivering the meal that will satisfy.

*(**EDDIE** turns to go and runs into the padded wall and bounces back, almost colliding with **ESTELLE**, who stands there holding a large pot filled with water)*

ESTELLE

I decided to help out and bring you your fish.

MARIE

(Turns away and sings softly)

Secret door
Secret door . . .
EDDIE

*(As **ESTELLE** lifts a fish from the pot)*

But it hasn't been cooked.

MARIE

Ah, then it would be far past living —

*(**EDDIE** turns and bangs into the wall)*

ESTELLE

(Whispers)

A fish!

MARIE

(Continues)

— while here in a previous state, there is still the chance, returned not too far off into a water environment, it may be able to function as a live, fulfilled being which it is or at least was, but we can hope still is.

ESTELLE

(Whispers to Eddie)

That's your generic fish.

MARIE

Shall we try?

ESTELLE

Oh, yeah!

DEEP VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKERS

Shall we succeed? I think we succeeded.

*(As the **VOICE** continues, all but the **DOCTOR** are given a fish and go to separate corners of the stage, holding a fish above their open mouths as if ready to drop it down their respective throats)*

The man in the bar said, "Careful Eddie, Poetry City is on the verge of destruction." He put his finger to his lips, and Eddie fought the impulse to seize the man's hand and return it forcibly to the side of his body. The man seemed not to notice what was going on inside Eddie, which made Eddie very suspicious. So he pretended he was looking for something inside his pocket. "Here it is," cried Estelle, who had just returned from the country several days earlier, and she handed Eddie a bunch of keys. Eddie, momentarily baffled, realized the best thing to do was accept the keys and act as if he knew what they were intended for.

DOCTOR

(Coming forward excitedly, as if he's solved a mystery and he wants to tell the world)

The taste is where? In my mouth. In the sensation which is registered in the brain or elsewhere?

In the tasted item, of course —? But of course not! It seems to CIRCULATE!

EDDIE

(Taking a step forward)

My mind wandered. Was I speaking?

DOCTOR

It was a taste.

EDDIE

What?

DOCTOR

For speaking.

EDDIE

(Holding up his fish and looking at it)

My fish?

*(**EDDIE, MARIE**, and **ESTELLE** go, "Meow!" and throw their fish to the center of the room)*

I dare not ask.

DOCTOR

(Radiant, starting a goofy dance)

Ask me, your waiter!

MARIE

I'm surprised the customer hasn't exploded.

EDDIE

I've exploded?

*(Coming forward to watch the **DOCTOR'S** dance, he slips on a fish and takes a pratfall)*

I have! But it seems to distribute itself over such a wide landscape, that the explosion itself is no explosion . . . but more a gentle wave.

MARIE

Oh, Eddie, wait; patient; while the large silver tray from the kitchen arrives —

ESTELLE

Shhhh.

DOCTOR

Poetry City, kid.

MARIE

Bottomless! Which means what? "Meaning" arrives, and the entire fabric so self-grown in radiant, fiery . . . "AM-IS!"

(Music starts to build, and a "fish dance" is commenced, with swimming motions, and with breathing like fish, and also yelping like puppy

dogs, and the line of dancers circles amidst the objects of the cluttered stage)

"Am-IS!"

*(The dance starts to end as **EDDIE** and the **DOCTOR** and **ESTELLE** collapse on the couch at the back of the room and wave their legs in the air, and **MARIE** runs downstage and declaims for the audience as the music is fading)*

A kind of flap — "am-is!" he flapped himself in the flapping — "am-is! am-is!"

WOMAN IN BLACK

EXCUSE ME! EXCUSE ME!

MARIE

(The music continues lower, as she sweeps across the stage still declaiming)

A waiter? Irrelevant. Because the fish arrive —

(The three on the couch, still waving their legs in the air, pipe out a falsetto "Wheee . . .!")

and flap upon the strand!

Grand and wonderful indeed.
Heed them with care!
He is not there, in the morning air!
Sliced by sunlight
that blinds, not at all;
that dazzles, not at all.

(Her energy running down now, as the music disappears completely)

Too bad.
Too sad.

*(Pause. **EDDIE** comes forward. Silence. Dejectedly, he goes and sits in a corner)*

MARIE

(At a mike)

Oh, Eddie.
Why retro-relax
when you can dazzle me effectively.
WOMAN IN BLACK
RETRO-RELAX!
RETRO-RELAX!
RETRO-RELAX!

MARIE

(Softly)

You have no story to tell.
So. You're a winner.
You want a story so you can believe in the world.
My message is quite the opposite.
Believe no longer.
You made it happen — okay, but the happening got stopped.

*(**EDDIE** has come slowly downstage to face her)*

That is to say, the world goes on, but you see what's going on right through the middle of it going on?

DOCTOR

(Singing softly, mockingly, in the rear shadows)

"Get your coat
and grab your hat.
Leave your worries
On the doorstep . . ."
MARIE

A new plan for life surfaces, Eddie.

ESTELLE

(Calling in a whisper)

Eddddd . . . ie?

MARIE
Everything that took you back
now takes you forward.
So you say.
"Am I confused?"

But whether it's a statement or a question of fact is equally so.

ESTELLE

*(Coming forward with the **DOCTOR**)*

Bundles of being.

*(The **DOCTOR** gestures shooting a pistol at **EDDIE**, and there is a loud BANG)*

He was that kind of hero.

*(Another gesture with a BANG. And **EDDIE** slowly and gently holds his head, as **ESTELLE** comes and gently embraces him)*

DOCTOR

(Whispering into a mike)

The darkness falls.
Fish drop gently through the suburban landscape.
Floral displays were considered.
Feet bringing one to the edge.
Upside-down . . .
A dilemma noncontradictory.
ESTELLE

*(Still holding **EDDIE**)*

We lose our way —

(Does a slow dance step out from his body, holding his hand)

and benefit.

DOCTOR

All manifestation takes a powder.

ESTELLE

*(To **EDDIE**, whose hand she still holds)*

Lift off.

MARIE

Caress

ESTELLE

Lift off

MARIE

Oh, Eddie, everything comes to he who waits.

EDDIE

This: waiting for language to turn on by itself.

MARIE
This . . . waiting for language to turn on by itself;
like waiting for rain
when the day has rained itself out.
Conditioned as you are to expect more —
but there is no more.
That kind of waiting.
DOCTOR

That kind of waiting

MARIE

That kind of waiting.

DEEP VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKERS

The city existed in silence.

*(**EDDIE** is crossing slowly center)*

And as Eddie approached, it was as if a temperature were palatable, rather than the usual buzz of conversation.

The passing time itself, implied silence. The feeling of "could" . . . that seemed to hover over the streets did whisper the same message. But Eddie had prepared himself. So there was no problem. There was nothing to talk about . . . because there was no talking.

EDDIE

(Standing alone in dim light, the others scattered at the sides of the room)

If I told the truth

(The others all give a loud, artificial sigh)

If I told the truth about all things, guess what? It wouldn't be MY city you'd be visiting. Follow this? All things have their own — shall we call it, a sense of direction? I wanted to participate in a real world but then it just got so painful. Here's what I did.

(He slowly crosses to a small table, with a single rose in a bud vase sitting on it)

I went to lunch.

MARIE

(Very softly)

We know where you went to lunch.

EDDIE
And the tablecloth was white, and sparkling, and the napkins were,
and even a flower was on my table in a little glass jar.
And I picked it up. — I mean my fork,
and imagined what lunch was going to be like.
Waiters were looking at me.
Many waiters.
As I was there in purposeful, frozen, I mean —
that was the state I was in.
A very frozen state.

*(The black curtain closes very quickly, hiding the restaurant. Then **EDDIE** appears, stepping through the curtain. To the side is an illuminated painting on an easel, with a painting of fruit and flowers displayed on it. Covered with real flowers. We realize it has been at the side since the*

*beginning. **ESTELLE** is looking at it. Now we remember that during the course of the play, it has occasionally been illuminated, for no reason that was evident at the time)*

EDDIE

That's what made it a different kind of city. It wasn't necessary to move, in the sense of moving on, see what I mean?

*(**ESTELLE** and **MARIE** run forward and kiss **EDDIE** on the cheek, then they immediately turn and reopen the curtain)*

You interrupted my train of thought. Should we call that polite, or think about it?

*(In the dimly illuminated main stage, we see that the **DOCTOR** again wears the giant head, and he stands behind the wind machine. **EDDIE** takes a step toward the audience. He has been holding a microphone on a cord, and now he lifts it and speaks softly into it)*

These are attributes of YOUR city, not my own. See: the web I spin out of suddenly — okay. Say "suddenly" . . . just lifted me into a sphere of being that nobody else recognized but you, me, and a hundred million Chinese.

*(**MARIE** and **ESTELLE** sigh audibly, and the giant head on the **DOCTOR** tilts to the side)*

Why do I say Chinese? Because when I'm crying sometimes, I accidently pull the sides of my eyes up, and I've seen other people in tears also, where I've come from, and so now, to make everything really different, let me say, this bite is for you.

*(Another sigh from **MARIE** and **ESTELLE**, and the head on the **DOCTOR** tilts slightly to the opposite side)*

Then, an amazing thing happens. He lifts his fork — I've already done that. . . .

(He lifts his fork)

And here, spread on the end of it, a whole, roast, morsel of some sort. No psychology anywhere here. No veined tracing of deliberate logical types. A morsel. This bite is for you

DEEP VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKER

*(As the **VOICE** speaks, **EDDIE** slowly moves to look at the illuminated painting. **ESTELLE** goes to the pot in which she had brought the fish. She extracts a gold ball and holds it up so that it shines in the light)*

Eddie

knew that something was missing from his life, and suspected that he would never find it.

*(**EDDIE** is moving to look at the gold ball)*

Eddie went to Poetry City to find it, but he didn't necessarily believe he would find it, but he believed and discovered he was right to believe that something was missing from his life, and his experiences in Poetry City intensified that belief, which was good, said Eddie, because it changed his relationship to the world he lived in, because he knew there was something missing that he couldn't find in the world, but because it was missing didn't mean it wasn't valuable. So Eddie knew he longed for and was devoted to something valuable, even if he couldn't find it or imagine it or therefore put his finger on it. That was Eddie's problem.

*(**ESTELLE** is moving the ball onto the tilted table. She has a thin stick she uses as a billiard cue, and she sets in a position to make a shot, using the gold ball)*

That was also Eddie's solution to his problem . . . which was . . . to HAVE the problem.

*(**ESTELLE** slowly changes her position and hands the ball to **EDDIE**. He takes it, and immediately cries out in pain, dropping the ball, which was burning hot, and runs to put his burnt hand into the pot filled with water. He then moves quickly onto the table and lies on his back on the table, as the others take a stick in each hand, and all scattered about the table point the sticks to **EDDIE** as if they were pinning a rare butterfly to the tilted table. After two seconds, they all let their sticks fall, making a terrible clatter as **EDDIE** leaps up and runs center, and **THE DOCTOR** and **ESTELLE** are busy setting small golden road pylons in a circle and **MARIE**, carrying a small suitcase and wearing her bonnet, comes slowly into the circle as the deep **VOICE** speaks)*

DEEP VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKERS

Eddie went to Poetry City, and there, on one of the major boulevards, he met Marie. "Marie! Marie!" he cried. "I didn't expect to find you in Poetry City." "Don't be a fool." Marie frowned. "I only come here to get gas."

She opened her small suitcase. . . .

(Her suitcase opens, many small containers tumble out and roll across the floor)

. . . and some small metal bottles rolled out onto the sidewalk.

*(**EDDIE** bends down and starts gathering them)*

Eddie hurriedly bent down and gathered them in his arms. "Here. Here's your gas, Marie." She kissed him on the cheek, to say thank you.

*(He offers his armful of bottles to **MARIE**. She looks at him. There is a pause. Then she slowly turns and walks rear into the darkness)*

"Ah . . . this could only happen in Poetry City," said Eddie.

*(Now **MARIE** is sitting at the piano. **EDDIE** is standing center, alone and dejected)*

Oh, Eddie, Eddie — you broke my heart, with your stories about a brilliant childhood. I also, wanted to track down those elusive vapors. But when the duck pond froze, opened, and then recoagulated, where could the ducks go?

*(**MARIE** has opened music on the piano, and at the same time, four small white duck cutouts appear on the piano top)*

How could they climb mountains, any of them, without my help? But I'm so weak, Eddie, compared to you. The pencil falls from my hand.

*(The **DOCTOR** has positioned himself downstage, and pantomimes shooting a pistol, as if in a shooting gallery. The noise of a shot accompanies his gesture, and one of the ducks falls)*

I drift slowly

(Another duck is shot)

and by the time the telephone rings

(Another shot, another duck falls)

I've lost all cause and effect as a way to realize what I signed up for in the name of responsibility.

*(**EDDIE** starts to a rear prop table upon which three of the industrial drums are piled one on top of the other, and he carefully lifts them all, keeping them balanced one on the other)*

All of a sudden, slumped over my table, I regained my balance and attributed it to the natural magnetism of whatever I'm really leaning on. Because you're still here, Eddie . . .

*(**EDDIE** approaches a railing which stands between him and the main part of*

the room, balancing his barrels)

. . . and I resolve to make myself invulnerable . . . just like you.

*(The music builds, and another voice is heard intoning "X MARKS THE SPOT . . .!" and **EDDIE** carefully lets his barrels drop over the railing and come crashing down into the set. At the same time, **MARIE** has picked up a bowling ball at the rear, and standing in front of the piano, she bowls down toward the footlights, where the ball crashes into a low guard rail and bounces back into the set. The music is loud, and she bowls another ball. And **EDDIE** leans exhausted on the railing, and the sweet music is loud so that it no longer seems sweet, but frightening now, and the lights fade and the play is over)*

THE END